**10 Political Parties**

**Study on the Go**

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[Print](http://thethinkspot.com/system/pdf/ThinkSpot-american-gov-2011-chapter10.pdf)

Conservative activists charge more moderate Republicans like Charlie Crist with being RINOs, that is, Republicans in Name Only.

**What We Learned**

***1. Why does the United States have a two-party system?*** The United States has a two-party system, which is the division of voter loyalties between two major political parties, resulting in the near exclusion of minor parties from seriously competing for a share of political power. Political scientists attribute America’s two-party system to the nature of the country’s election system, especially plurality elections and the Electoral College, as well as the absence of fundamental social and political divisions.

***2. What role do the national organizations play in promoting the success of their political parties?*** The national political party organizations recruit candidates, provide them with technical assistance and advice, and spend money on their behalf. Historically, the Republicans have enjoyed a fundraising advantage over the Democrats, but that advantage disappeared in 2008.

The national parties also produce platforms that demonstrate where the parties stand on issues. Since 1960, the parties have grown further apart philosophically, with the Democrats generally taking liberal positions and the Republicans expressing conservative views. Democrats believe that a strong government is needed to provided essential services and remedy social inequalities, while Republicans believe that a strong government interferes with business and threatens individual freedom.

***3. What groups of people typically vote Democratic or Republican?*** Democrats do better among middle- and low-income people, minority voters, high-school dropouts, people with graduate degrees, women, younger people, single persons, gay/lesbian/bisexual individuals, people living in the Northeast and the West Coast, liberals, Jews, people who seldom if ever attend religious services, and people living in urban areas. In contrast, Republicans are stronger with middle- and upper-income groups, white voters, people with bachelor’s degrees, men, older people, married people, southerners, conservatives, white evangelical Protestants, people who attend religious services regularly, and people living in rural areas.

***4. What factors affect the position of a political party in the American political system?*** The strength of a political party depends on its level of support among the electorate and the offices it holds. The two parties were at near parity in terms of party identification in 2010 and, after the 2010 midterm election, they shared power. Republicans controlled the U.S. House while Democrats enjoyed a majority of seats in the U.S. Senate and held the White House. Whereas the political party or party coalition holding the reins of government in a democracy is the governing party, the party out of power is the opposition party. Some political sciences use the concepts of party era and political party realignment to explain changes in the party balance. The phenomenon of one political party controlling the legislative branch of government while the other holds the executive branch is known as divided government.

**Tips for Success**

**Be a problem solver:** Learn to be a problem solver, someone who finds solutions to problems and identifies new ways to get the job done, rather than someone who always turns to others to solve problems.

**Key Terms**

**Divided Government**

the phenomenon of one political party controlling the legislative branch of government while the other holds the executive branch

**Electoral College**

the system established in the Constitution for indirect election of the president and vice president

**Exit Polls**

surveys based on random samples of voters leaving the polling place

**Gender Gap**

differences in party identification and political attitudes between men and women

**Governing Party**

the political party or party coalition holding the reins of government in a democracy

**Multiparty System**

the division of voter loyalties among three or more major political parties

**Opposition Party**

the political party out of power in a democracy

**Party Era**

a period of time characterized by a degree of uniformity in the nature of political party competition

**Party Platform**

a statement of party principles and issue positions

**Party Realignment**

a change in the underlying party loyalties of voters that ends one party era and begins another

**Plurality Election System**

a method for choosing public officials that awards office to the candidate with the most votes; it favors a two-party system

**Political Party**

a group of individuals who join together to seek government office in order to make public policy

**Proportional Representation (PR)**

an election system that awards legislative seats to each party approximately equal to its popular voting strength

**Republican In Name Only (RINO)**

an accusation that a Republican candidate or elected official is insufficiently conservative to merit the support of party activists

**Third Party**

a minor party in a two-party system

**Two-Party System**

the division of voter loyalties between two major political parties

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is the cause of America’s two-party system?

2. What problems do third-party and independent candidates face in America’s electoral system?

3. Compare and contrast the Democratic and Republican parties of today in terms of voting patterns and issue positions.

4. Explain some of the reasons for the alternation in power between the Democratic and Republican Party.

5. In what ways can divided government be a positive and be a negative for the policymaking process?

**Interactive Activity**

**Video: Tea Party Victories Concern For GOP**

The United States enjoys a stable two-party system. The party organization is hierarchically structured, but open to any members who chose to become active. The party-in-the-electorate helps to organize elections, field candidates for office, and communicates with and influences voters. After the 2008 elections, however, the Tea Party movement began among conservative rank-and-file Republicans, which seemed to give new life to the party. How did the established party leadership react? Would the movement threaten to splinter the party, or would it strengthen Republican turnout? In this activity, you will examine these and other issues as you watch AP news coverage of victories by Tea Party candidates in primary elections.

[View Video](http://media.pearsoncmg.com/long/long_longman_media_1/2011_mpsl_video/ap_primary_rdp/player.html)

**“Talking About American Government” Podcasts**

Author Neal Tannahill discusses the most important concepts in this chapter

* [Party Control in Congress](http://abavtooldev.pearsoncmg.com/VPStreaming/audio.php?clipID=ab_amgov_think_tennahill/ch08_controlling_congress.mp3)
* [Party System](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2173558976?i=1180154988)
* [Party Identification](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2174230711?i=1495593642)
* [Party Realignment](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2182320129?i=1831178628)
* [Income, Education, and Party Support Patterns](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2173558901?i=1330609261)
* [Gender, Lifestyle, Age, and Party Support Patterns](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2173935934?i=1570681372)
* [Religion and Party Support Patterns](https://deimos.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/BrowsePrivately/hccs.edu.1989558874.01989558881.2173935934?i=1570681372)
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